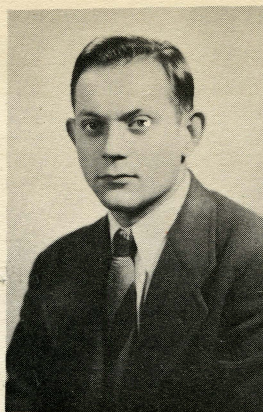


# CINEMA 16 EXPLAINED

By

Amos Vogel,  
*President*



*Amos Vogel, in his native Vienna, observed Nazi manipulation of the screen . . . after extensive study of the U. S. documentary, formed Cinema 16 in 1947.*

CINEMA 16 was created by a small group of individuals interested in the advancement of the motion picture, who felt they had waited long enough for others to do what was clearly imperative: to create a showcase for outstanding documentary and fact films, to bridge the gap between such film production and its vast potential audience.

Cinema 16's purpose is two-fold. It will not only present artistically satisfying films to the public but will awaken people to a greater understanding of their world by presentation of socially purposeful documentary films.

Taken in this wide sense the term "documentary" encompasses not only socially purposeful films as *THE CITY* and the contributions of such men as Grierson, Rotha, Flaherty, but also scientific and educational subjects.

Aware of the existence of literally scores of such films, Cinema 16 also believed there was an audience interested in them. But apparently you had to be a school child, a club member or a "shut-in" to see them.

It was to provide regular screenings before the general public, as well as lectures and forum discussions by known directors and experts in the field, and to premiere and encourage the production of new films of this nature, that Cinema 16 was formed.

The original group that constituted Cinema 16 consisted of Miss Marcia Diener (executive secretary), myself (president), David E. Diener (as public relations representative) and Mrs. Renee P. Avery, (Organizational Coordination). Connected with no group or interests, our project was entirely self-financed.

Incorporated as an educational non-profit organization under New York State Educational Laws, Cinema 16 in October 1947 gave its first performance at the Provincetown Playhouse in Greenwich Village. Immediate and complete success proved the validity of our contention that there was a large potential audience waiting for such films. Four performances of the first program were planned. Eight were immediately forced upon us and 16 finally presented, all sold out in advance. A similar response was experienced with our December program, also shown 16 times during the month. The theater holds 200 people. Our audiences so far have totalled almost 9000 people for two performances on each Tuesday and Wednesday night.

Films presented on our first programs were: Julian Huxley's scientific *MONKEY TO MAN*; *LAMENTATION*, a Martha Graham dance study; *GLEN FALLS SEQUENCE*, non-

objective color animations by Douglas Crockwell; *BOUNDARY LINES*, International Film Foundation; *THE POTTED PSALM*, experimental film by Sidney Peterson; *FEELING OF REJECTION*, psychological study, National Film Board of Canada; John Ferno's *AND SO THEY LIVE*; *FIVE ABSTRACT FILM EXERCISES* by the Whitney Brothers; Norman McLaren's *HEN HOP* and *FIVE FOR FOUR* (animation); *SEEDS OF DESTINY*, Academy Award winner; *UNDERGROUND FARMERS*, a scientific film (Library Films, Inc.); *FRAGMENT OF SEEKING*, a "documentary of the soul"; and *YOUR CHILDREN AND YOU* (British Information Services).

In presenting, together with fact films, experimental films of all types, Cinema 16 functions not as an arbiter of tastes, but as a showcase for various types of film that try to advance and broaden the medium. It does not endorse nor reject surrealist or abstract films it has shown but presents them as "experiments" to the public to judge for itself. Cinema 16 believes that to make intelligent choice audiences must first be presented with alternatives.

In general Cinema 16 attempts to present on each program one film of each category (social documentary, scientific, animation, experimental, one special interest) and so to reach a broader and more differentiated audiences.

Questionnaires were given out to early audiences and provided a comprehensive statistical survey of this field. Analysis of these sheets provide interesting figures. Almost 2,000 questionnaires were filled out. Comments ranged from: "We have been waiting for this for years", to: "Brilliant, keep it up!" Almost 90 percent either wished to join immediately or asked for information about Cinema 16's membership division, to be established shortly. In answer to: "What types of films would you like to see?" the highest groups were for documentary and experimental films, as well as for those on psychology and the arts. Of utmost importance is the fact that 50 percent had heard about the project, not from advertisements but from friends, thereby indicating the public's approval of our work. Audiences were drawn from all boroughs of

*Cinema 16 Associates: David E. Diener, motion picture publicist, free-lance script and playwright . . . Marcia Diener, research and statistics in public opinion polls . . . Rene P. Avery, business management . . . Robert Delson, chairman National Film Cooperative; Associated Motion Picture Industries' Board of Directors . . . and the author of this article whose film background is creative and critical work in Austria.*

New York, from Philadelphia, New Jersey and Connecticut.

Scores of letters have come into the offices of Cinema 16, asking for information about film rental and sale, as well as for advice on program planning. All the major New York newspaper and magazine critics have attended special previews held for them at the Preview Theater, 1600 Broadway; many reviews or articles have been printed; several radio stations have carried announcements.

Unavoidable difficulties include far too high costs that can be met only by further expansion. The fact that Cinema 16 acts as a showcase for hitherto comparatively unknown 16mm films, thus opening an entirely new market, is not fully realized by some distributors but the vast majority cooperate in our attempt to bring serious films to the public.

Cinema 16 "pioneers" also in being first to have to submit all its films for censorship approval, since they are being shown publicly. Operating under a 1921 law which could not distinguish between 35mm and 16mm film, 35mm fees and a complete text of the commentary must be submitted by us. As the text is often unavailable, we have to have a stenographer take it down from the screen. There are other problems, such as the banning of the Hackenschmid (Hamid) film, *PRIVATE LIFE OF A CAT*, dealing with the birth of kittens, as "obscene."

Present plans call for further expansion, with additional performances booked for the coming months, including for the first time Saturday and Sunday matinees. Cinema 16 is also in the process of establishing a membership division to which films not otherwise available will be presented, as well as lectures and "gala" premieres.

By being the first to present 16mm films of this type to the general public on a regular and planned basis, Cinema 16 has within three months of operation created a viable nucleus for a documentary film theater in New York and elsewhere.

*Ed. Note:* After the above article was in type, word was received that the "Cinema 16 Film Society" has been launched, with seven membership plans and with special group rates. The Society "will present to its members films that cannot be shown publicly" due to commercial and other restrictions. Plans have also been announced for collaboration with the National Board of Review of Motion Pictures.



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